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Musician's musician is outstanding

Music
By Jacob Siskind

Last night at the Salle Wilfrid Pelletier Montreal concert-goers must have been thinking, "better late than never."

William Steinberg first came to North America in the late 1930's but it was not until this week that Montreal had the opportunity to hear him conduct. That this was a serious oversight was obvious throughout the concert and it was equally obvious that the audience was aware of this lapse.

At the end of the program there was none of the usual mad scramble for the exit. People stayed to applaud a musician who had come to this city not to make an impression, but to share with those in the hall his love of and enthusiasm for the music he was conducting.

William Steinberg is one of that older generation of conductors who do not avoid display deliberately, but who concentrate wholly on the music at hand. His beat is undemonstrative but clear at the back of the hall. His musical ideas are highly individual but always considered.

In short, he is a musician's musician and he is able to communicate that to both the orchestral players and the audience behind him.

Knows each note

But most important — he makes music. He knows every note of every score he conducts and he knows what each note has to say.

So many young conductors today can whip up brilliant, superficial performances. Steinberg does not seem to know the meaning of the word superficiality.

The Schubert Symphony No. 5 and the Brahms Symphony No. 1 are both works that have been heard here dozens of times in the past two or three decades. Steinberg not only made them sound fresh and new, he made each phrase and each silence seem completely personal and totally meaningful.

Too personal

Even Brahms' longwinded development sections took on a sense of purpose — giving the listener the feeling that an important debate was in progress. I don't know when I last listened to Brahms with such rapt attention — and with the exception of six measures in the finale, when I felt the conductor was unable to make some obvious padding meaningful, I found myself totally involved.

This kind of music making is so rare these days that I feared it was too personal and too severe for most members of the audience, but it was clear at once from the ovation at the close that Steinberg was making his ideas just as clear to everyone else in the hall.

The quality of the music making was so captivating that one almost forgot some of the elements that made it so persuasive. Steinberg made the members of the Montreal Symphony produce sounds quite unlike any I have heard them do before. There was a velvet quality to the strings and a silken sound to the woodwinds that was positively breathtaking.

I had the feeling that were Steinberg to have come here often in the past the Montreal Symphony would have been forced to develop into a first class ensemble years ago.

No other conductor in recent memory has balanced the strings against the brass so effectively. At no time did the wind section overpower the strings and the result was the kind of sound that only a great orchestra produces.

Shimmering

What was perhaps even more exciting was the way in which the conductor got the woodwind soloists to phrase. I have never heard the oboe solos in the first movement of the Brahms played with greater simplicity and eloquence and the long clarinet solos in the movements that followed sang more sweetly than I imagined possible.

In the Schubert, it was the flute that came through in all its shimmering beauty.

The conductor seemed to have found a way to get each player to give of his or her best at all times.

Of course there were times when I could not agree with the conductor's interpretation — but these were also moments when I found his statements so compellingly different that I wanted more time to be able to digest them.

The Schubert Symphony was given a reading that flowed from section to section with a sense of inevitability that made all of the conductor's changes of tempo seem totally logical and organic. In lesser hands a performance of this kind would have fallen apart — Steinberg made it all seem as natural as breathing.

Skittish

The evening opened with a rather skittish reading of the Elgar Cockaigne Overture — in which conductor and orchestra seemed to be feeling each other out.

They must have made contact somewhere along the line because the rest of the evening was simply magnificent. Now, how soon can we invite William Steinberg to conduct here again?

Ferocious satire, sentiment mark Desrochers

Singer-monologuist Desrochers

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Clémence Desrochers, one of the most popular singer-monologuists of the province, has launched yet another show at Le Patriote.

Her unique talents are at home in this citadel of the boîte-à-chanson, as she exudes a highly personal, intimate and theatrical style. She is not a great vocalist (in fact, technically she is lacking) but her facial expressions and the verve of her performance speak more for her localized poetry, drama and satire.

Her long and varied experience on stage with many of Quebec's leading entertainers gives her show an extra edge. She's appeared in theatrical productions, revues, and television programs with such stars as Claude Léveillée, Jean-Pierre Ferland, André Gagnon, Diane Dufresne, Yvon Deschamps and others.

ZING

This is why her most successful skits are those based around local showbiz. She cuts through the jovial, whether she's impersonating a female radio personality or a topless waitress. She zings through her material with the same kind of ferocious comic satire that characterizes Forestier and Dufresne at their best.

There is also a mire characters-like sentimentality about Clémence. A fine line exists between sentitive human description and tedious local prattle, and she demonstrates both. Throughout it all, though, there's little doubt she has an enormous breadth of emotion and vision.

Clémence has tremulous words for her father, the poet Alfred Desrochers. They are heartwarming — but understandably they do not carry the punch of her satiric material.

QUARTET

Accompanied by a fine young quartet of instrumentalists, who temper pop-rock with more traditional forms, Clémence is as comfortable as ever on the stage that's become a home for her. Much of the show is the basis of a new album which brushes up her vocals with production work.

However, she is first and foremost a stage artist and it is at Le Patriote where she radiates those remarkably alive human instincts that form the basis for her continuing popularity.

Paul Horn weaving magic at In Concert

By NIGHTHAWK
for The Gazette

Although Paul Horn has only played once before in Montreal, a solid nucleus of fans was there last night to hear him weave his many magics at In Concert.

Horn should spell his last name with an 'X'. He plays C-concert flute, alto and bass flutes, as well as the alto sax.

Since he adds an echoplex amplifier to his C flute on some tunes, the sound tends to become an image full of space and new dimensions.

His present quintet is made up of young Canadian jazzmen who perform a very wide scope of musical styles and can play as tight as they can lay back.

DRIVE

On electric and acoustic pianos, Hon Johnston is full of drive and syncopations, though he can literally embroider phrases which are a flurry of sounds. He also turns out to be a fine composer, as with his tune Lee's Way.

Neil Swainson has a strong and assured hand on the acoustic bass, and through his sensitive fingering came up with fab-sinating accents.

Kat Hendrikse is both forceful and delicate on drums and shares rythmic harmonies with Jim McGilveray, who handles an impressive array of percussion instruments.

Musically, Paul Horn certainly knows how to weave his own magic. Last night's opening set started with a very meditative flute solo which seemed to take hold on the audience and open the doors of musical perception.

The tune that followed was driving and funky and gave solo room to each member of the quintet. Then there was bop, and bossa nova, an original composition by Hon Johnston which drew on the samba and Brazilian roots, and Charlie Parker's Scrapple From The Apple, played full speed ahead.

Horn calmed everyone down again with Tom Scott's Love Poem, a romantic ballad, and ended this first set with a superb experimental piece that travelled somewhere between Hindemith, Ravel, Adderley, Joplin and funk.

It doesn't matter what mood you carry in with you: Paul Horn and his quintet will take all your feelings on a trip — a very good trip.

Southam to retire by 1977 from arts centre position

OTTAWA — (CP) — G. Hamilton Southam, 58, will retire in the next 12 to 18 months as director-general of the National Arts Centre.

Southam advised the centre's board of directors yesterday he will not seek a renewal of his term of office when it expires at the end of March, 1977, and will be ready to leave the post any time after next October.

Since its opening in 1969, the centre has grown steadily in the audiences it has attracted. Its latest annual report, for the 1974-75 season, showed total paid attendance of 973,931 in the centre's three auditoriums, 80 per cent of capacity.

Southam, formerly a member of the diplomatic corps, headed a committee formed in 1962 to study the feasibility of a national centre for the performing arts in Ottawa. He then was appointed co-ordinator of the project when the government accepted the plan in December, 1963.

He was appointed director-general of the centre in 1967, two years before the $46-million building was completed and opened in 1969.

U.K. dancer named National Ballet head

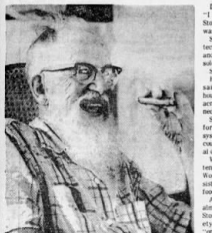
TORONTO — (CP-UPI) — Alexander Grant, 50, director of the Royal Ballet's touring company, Ballet for All, has been appointed artistic director of the National Ballet of Canada, effective next July 1.

Grant, a native of New Zealand, has been a dancer with England's leading ballet company for 30 years, specializing in character roles. As head of the Ballet for All troup, Grant has had extensive experience in touring and in building new audiences for ballet.

He succeeds Celia Franca, founder of the National Ballet who re-assumed the duties of artistic director after David Haber resigned this summer after a brief term of office and conflict with the ballet's board of directors.

Paul S. Deacon, president of the National Ballet's board of directors, said Grant would work periodically with the company before assuming the position full-time on July 1, 1976.

Nero Wolfe creator, Rex Stout, dies



Detective writer Rex Stout

DANBURY, Conn. — (UPI-AP) — "I was a storyteller," author Rex Stout once told an interviewer. "I was not a great writer."

Stout created the rotund, witty detective character Nero Wolfe in 1934, and wrote 46 Wolfe mysteries that sold 45 million copies in 22 languages.

Stout died Monday. He was 88.

His daughter, Barbara Selleck, said he died at Highteadow, the house he built 45 years ago on 58 acres of hillside straddling the Connecticut-New York state border.

Stout, who was also responsible for setting up the school banking system in 400 cities throughout the country, was nothing like his fictional detective.

Wolfe hates exercise and has a hot temper. Stout was agile and affable. Wolfe likes gourmet cooking and insists on it. Stout, too, liked good food, but wouldn't refuse a hot dog.

Although his detective yarns were almost always aloof from politics, Stout himself was involved in a variety of political issues. An early "one-worlder" and anti-Fascist, he spoke out for an early entry into the Second World War and carried on a campaign against Roosevelt. He participated in several wartime national radio programs aimed against Nazi propaganda.

A Quaker, he was also president of the Society for the Prevention of World War III and chairman for more than 20 years of the Writers Board for World Government.

Stout considered the FBI an "odious, overbearing and unprincipled" organization and in his most controversial novel, The Doorbell Rang, published in 1965, the agency is the villain.

Stout was born, one of nine children, in Noblesville, Ind., Dec. 1, 1886. He read the bible twice before he was 3 and before he was 10 he read about 1,200 other volumes of works from his father's library.

His first novel, How Like A God, was published in 1929. His first Wolfe novel, Fer-de-Lance, was published in 1934 and was snapped up by the public despite the Depression.

"I write for 29 consecutive days each year," Stout once said. "I figure on six weeks for a book, but I share it does." He said he never rewrote or even read any of them.

His last book, another Wolfe mystery, A Family Affair, was published last month.

The fictional Wolfe weighs one seventh of a ton and lives in a four-story brownstone on West 35th Street in New York City. His assistant, Archie Goodwin, does his legwork, a chef cooks his meals and another assistant helps him tend to the 10,000 orchids he keeps in a rooftop greenhouse.

Some students of Wolfe have argued that he is the illegitimate son of another fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, since Wolfe was born in Montenegro about the time Holmes visited there in one of Arthur Conan Doyle's mysteries.

But Stout discounted that possibility as a coincidence. "Oh, somebody's just having a lot of fun. If they think that's fun, well, okay.

"I honestly know nothing about where he came from. Listen, you know damn well in all fiction writing, dramatic, narrative — no matter what level of literature — all characters are of two kinds. They're all either created or contrived. In the created ones, the writer really has no idea where he came from or anything else.

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